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Tiamat And Other Verses

BY
FRANK PRENTICE RAND

Collected for the perusal of his friends and to satisfy
a whim of the author

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*My Country
Beloved and Beautiful
Distracted
Fraught with Prejudice and Pain
Young in Strength and Dreams
Destined to lead the World
to Brotherhood
and Peace*

Tiamat*

I am weary of words and dreams, and wearily weak
at heart,
Stupidly sick of science and all but distrustful of
art;
And my spirit is low like the wind, and my faith is
o'ercast like the west;
My limbs are crying for sleep and my soul is yearning
for rest;
Ay, but there is no sleep, neither rest for the soul,
in life,
With the world a turbulent scene of a deadly and
desperate strife.

Can ye hear it, tumultuous war, brawling in blood
o'er the earth,
Sucking its slimy tusks in a passion akin to mirth,
Reeking with odious sweat, grimy with carnage and
dust,
Burning and killing and raping in the frenzy of
fiendish lust?
What a hideous monster it is! No pen hath the
power to tell
Of its ugly and sinister face, a visage incarnate
of hell.

*The Assyrian god of chaos and wickedness: perhaps a fitting name for militarism. These verses describe an attitude of mind not uncommon among Americans a few months ago.

I said, "I will flee from its path; I will take myself out of its way.

Perhaps it will pass and begone like a western tornado at play".

So I fled, but it followed me fast; and I hid, but it hunted me out;

And I scorned it, and laughed in fear; but it mocked me with sneer and shout;

Then I looked at the tail of the thing, which lashed and stunk and curled,

And I knew the ghastly truth, that its path was the whole wide world.

I parried for time to think, and I talked at the fiend from my soul;

I uttered its horrible name, and defied its demonic control;

I bade it begone like a cur, and I turned on my heel as though free,

But I felt its loathsome leer, and it would not let me be;

And it hissed like a thousand snakes, and its breath was hot with spite,

Till it snarled a jeer at last, and the words "too proud to fight".

Then I threw back the lie to its teeth, and I stripped off my shirt in a flash;

I grabbed up a bludgeon of oak, and my muscles were keen for the clash;

And then,—ah then I grew faint with a sudden and sickening shame,

And I staggered away in the brush like a poor,
palsied creature of game;
'Twas the look in its eye that repelled me, a look
of unspeakable glee,
For it said in obscene exultation, "Strike once and
be straightway like me".

Is it gone? Is it waiting out there? I am sure in
my heart it is near,
For the leaves are withering still as though they
were stricken with fear,
And my legs have grown weak as with age, and my
spirit is panting in pain;
And oh for a breath of the wind or a dash of the
cooling rain!
Can it be it is gone after all? Ah, that were too
good to be true.
Did I conquer by simply refusing? I would that
I knew.

I am glad that I met it squarely, I am glad that
I looked in its face;
It burned me to look, but I saw it, and the years
will never erase
From my poor, troubled brain that visage, a visage
so hideously bad
That I knew why millions who feel it become de-
liriously mad.
It was not the gore that besmeared it, for that could
do naught but disgust;
'Twas the treacherous soul behind it,—the spirit of
human lust.

I had thought the arch-demon a stranger, but slowly
the consciousness grew
That somehow the beast was familiar and only its
form was new.
Upright it had walked in our cities, like a man in
both speech and attire,
Bearing the deadliest magic, which lures men to
vicious desire,
Bribing their hearts with power, with prominence,
pleasure and pelf,
Making them blind with the baubles of the glorifi-
cation of self.

This highly respectable devil, so subtle and smug
and secure,
Has builded a stronghold palatial on the burden-
some toil of the poor,
Wielding a power despotic through falsehood and
cunning and vice,
Acclaimed by the men "successful", by the women,
"very nice".
When sober it fooled the world by peacefully keeping
the law;
But now, when crazed and drunk, it revealeth its
soul in war.

But now I am weary with thinking, and my heart
is as heavy as lead
At the vision of nations in madness with the master
of lust at their head,
Swaggering on to destruction, blasting the buds with
their breath,

Glutting a ghoulish frenzy, stenching the fields
with death:

There are widows and orphans in mourning; their
plaints are poignant and sad;

But who is to weep for the nations, for a world
demonically mad?

I would weep if I could, but I cannot; my soul craveth
nothing but rest;

It is vain for the helpless to struggle; surely to
slumber is best.

The centuries bring new methods but the same old
pleasure and pain;

They store up the dreams of the sages, but all of
their years are in vain,

For the lust that controlled the caveman is lord
and master yet,

And hope is a fond delusion, and now I would fain
forget.

I had said that the race is better, that the lust is
becoming more weak,

But truly I was mistaken, and the greatest of fools
to speak;

And they laugh at me now, the scoffers, although
they agreed with me then.

Oh how can a drunken demon bedevil a nation of
men?

Is there something to do? I know not. It seemeth
at last to be right

To crawl away in the shadows and pray for the
coming of night.

Ah, but there is no night, but the blackness of base
defeat,
With the fiend at large to glut o'er everything dear
and sweet;
A man could not go to his grave with such desolation
behind;
He never could lie at rest for the moans of despair
on the wind.
The earth is not safe for sleep, not even the sleep
of death.
Awake ye, my soul, and arise; defy till thy dying
breath.

Oh woe to the monarchs in lust, those men without
pity or shame,
Who nurtured the fiend for a tool, to gain for them
power and fame!
Believing the nations would quail, they loosed it
on water and land,
And hoped to impose their will while keeping the
monster in hand.
Woe upon woe to such men! For them are the
eons of years
To suffer the anguish of soul of millions of mothers
in tears.

But from them there is little to fear. 'Tis the lust
which is greater than they.
They fed it and thought they were masters, but now
they are truly its prey.
With my ear to the earth I can hear it—the trampling
of myriad feet,

The curses, the groans, the explosions, the violent
horror complete;
And my eyes fairly ache with the vision of the vile
and detestable maw
Which vomits the mess to reswallow,—the dull,
drunken spirit of war.

There is work for a world of men, yea even for me
with the rest;
But I still feel the look in its eye, and I wonder
what way is the best:
Shall I seek to destroy it by force,—a way which I
greatly abhor?
And then, if I conquer at last, can I shake off the
passion of war?
Shall I stoutly refuse to engage? Can it be that
its vitals rely
On battle and struggle for life? If I starve it in
scorn, will it die?

I am weary and weak and distraught, a pitiful pygmy
of dust,
With something divine in my soul, and a dangerous
portion of lust.
When the dragon ferrets me out, shall I strike it,
or shall I refrain?
I fear it no more,—the monster,—but how can I
plague it with pain?
Where shall I crawl to now? What shall I seek
to do?
I am sick of this waiting and silence. I would that
I knew.

Standards

It isn't what you do, lad,
So much as what you are.
The boy who keeps him true, lad,
Is manlier by far
Than he who kicks the goal, lad,
And wins the football game:
For a generous, stainless soul, lad,
Is more than skill and fame.

It isn't what you do, lad,
So much as what you are.
The laurel wreaths are few, lad,
That do not hide a scar.
And when with youth and health, lad,
Our proudest projects end,
We offer name and wealth, lad,
For one warm-hearted friend.

These are the days of fate, lad:
These wondrous days for choice
Of dream and deed and mate, lad.
So choose; but heed the Voice
That whispers from the blue, lad,
Beyond the farthest star,—
It isn't what you do, lad,
So much as what you are.

Johnny's Millennium

My brother Henry's got a gun;
He's goin' off to Washington,
Er somewhere; so's my cousin Dan.
Gee, I'd like to be a man.
All marchin' round ist big an' grand,
An' Henry right behind the band;
While people cheer an' bawl an' say
That they are heroes anyway.

An' Pa, he says that he wud go,
Right off, if 'twasn't for his toe
What's corny; an' that he'd ist like
To charge the foe an' make 'em hike
For cover; then he says that we
Have been too patient; an' says he,
"When folks insult ye, then it's right
To pitch right in an' have a fight".

An' Ma, why Ma she chimes in too
An' says what war's the thing to do.
An' me? Well I don't say a thing,
Not then, but I ist want to sing
An' shout, coz now she'll never dare
To cuss me out an' jerk my hair
For fightin' roosters; an' I'll bet
My Rock will lick Tom's Leghorn yet.

Ist yesterday Jim Smith an' me,
We got to fightin', coz, you see,
Well, Jim he said my hair was red,
An' I,—don't 'member what I said;
But anyhow we had it out
An' I gave Jim a bloody snout,
An' he,—well Jim was awful tough,
But I ist made him yell "Enough".

Then I come home, an', well I guess
Ma thought I'd kinder made a mess
Of clothes an' things; an' she called Pa,
An' he, he said he'd lick the tar
Clean outer me; an' started in;
But I ist hollered out like sin,
"You said 'twas right to fight"; an' he,
He sorter grinned an' let me be.

If only I was growed up tall,
I'd have the biggest gun of all,
An' longest sword; an' I wud shoot
More men than Hen, with Dan to boot.
I wudn't try to keep me neat,
Nor wash my ears; an' I wud eat
Ist cake an' candy. Hully gee!
The fighter's is the life for me.

The world's improvin', don't you see?
Ist comin' round to 'gree with me.
Why I've been knowin' right along
That Ma an' all them guys was wrong
What said that fightin' ain't no fun
An' never oughten'd to be done:
Why even the preacher says it's right,
An' prays for them what goes to fight.

I'd like to meet a pacifist,
What don't believe in fightin'; ist
Stands up an' keeps forgivin'; Gee!
I'd trim his fizz up properly.
I'd kick his shins; I'd punch him too;
I'd swat his snoozle black an' blue.
Hurrah for fightin'! My, it's great.
I'm glad I wasn't born too late.

“By the Waters of Babylon”

I heard him humming it, about his kit,
A tune that comes to me from other days,
From days that seem so strangely far away,
So dreamy and unreal, I have to stop
And shake myself to know they passed at all.
The tune was churchly too, an old refrain,
And fraught somehow with strong and ancient faith;
The tenor used to sing it now and then,
While I would sit and listen, half asleep,
Not stirred, I fear; but with a sense of calm.
How odd they seem, those Sunday mornings, now!
The townsfolk, all so neat, precise and grave,
So very worldly too; the antique pews,
The faded carpet, everything austere;
And then the minister in sober black,
Lifting his voice as though for vital things,
And somehow missing fire; devoutly long
In exegesis, dull with culls and chaff;
His favorite theme was freedom of the will;
I seem to hear him yet; those painful silks
Behind me, scented, I can hear them too.
I doubt not that the parson knew his books;
I wonder if he knew his God,—or mine.
And now this war! I did not volunteer
Because of any great and holy cause,
Though I presume the cause is good enough;
I came because I had to,—some strange will,
And not my own, that drew me smiling on;
The lure of things beyond, that makes the men
Climb gladly from the trenches, out and on,

To force an issue with those deadly guns;
A quest for life; I could not help but come.
And now? Well now I cannot help but stay,
And it is well. If I am doomed to die
To-day, next week, next year, 'tis all the same;
I hope 'twill be a bullet in the brain,
No slashing bayonet thrust, no tearing shell.
But what I meant is this; that he was wrong,
That parson with his freedom of the will.
There is no choice. A man does as he must.
At least I'm sure that thus it is with me.
You see that corner there? 'Twill stink by noon
In case the sun is warm. I might be there,
But fate, it seems, has something else in store.
A dirty job it was: There was a time
I could not think of seeing such a sight,
Much less of taking part, of having said
The ghastly thing should come to pass at all.
It was a paltry gain, but still it gave
Us work to do, and battered up the foe.
It was like cleaning out a nest of rats
In boyhood days; and somehow after all
A man and rat are very much the same.
That tune again! The tenor liked it too.
We said there could not be another war;
The parson proved the point a score of times,
And I thought just the same, for warfare seemed
A thing unreal; and now the same with peace.
I sometimes long to go back home again
To see the folks and town and all, and then
It somehow seems a long and weary way.
What should I do to make the hours pass

In such a place as that? They wear you out
With silly yarns and talk about the crops.
And city life at bottom is the same.
The world is not the world of yesterday,
But somehow cramped and warped. I fear my work
Would seem too dull for words, a tired tale
Too oft repeated. I cannot comprehend.
That fellow there, so vile with hair and grime,
He prays for peace; but he has home and kids
And stuff like that; perhaps that makes the odds.
But still I rather think that all in all
A bullet in the brain is best. 'Tis strange.
I fear the day will be too long, and warm.
No work to do; I wish that it were night.
I had a game of chess; we let it stand
To finish later. The moves are in my mind.
There was some fighting to the south at dawn.
If Paul comes back, I think that I shall win.

Tommy and Fritz

I wasn't 'alf wantin' to kill 'im,
And yet there 'e was;
Still I paused with my 'and on the trigger,
Because,—well because.

And it seems that 'e 'adn't no bullets
Or something 'ad balked;
And 'e knew a good smatter of English,
So, somehow, we talked.

'E 'adn't no 'eart to be fightin',
The bloomin' old 'Un;
And I found 'e 'ad only a notion
Of what 'ad been done.

'E thought that 'is land was invaded.
Now wasn't 'e dense?
'E actually thought 'e was wagin'
A war of defense.

But 'e wouldn't believe what I told 'im;
Just wouldn't, you know,
Allow that 'is people were liars
And trust in a foe.

Then 'e told me 'is side of the story;
And then, though I knew
That 'is yarn was wild, I just wondered
If mine was all true.

Well I towed 'im to camp as a capture;
I 'ad to do that;
Though 'e wasn't 'alf bad as a fellow,—
Just blind as a bat.

And sometimes at night in the trenches,
Perplexed and alone,
I think of the 'Un in 'is blindness,—
And me in my own.

After?

One was a lover of Browning,
The other of Velvet Joe,
And they talked with casual pauses
In the brazier's dingy glow.

The man with the pipe was yawning
And squinting down his gun;
"What will ye do," he queried,
"After the war is done?"

His comrade answered tersely,
And said, "I shall take my pen
And write of this frightful conflict
For the sake of future men.

"I shall tell of deeds of valor
Which all men long to know;
But mostly I shall deal with
The baseness of the foe.

"I shall show the vicious purpose
Which prompted them to fight,
Their lust for blood and conquest,
Their scorn of truth and right.

"I shall show their fiendish frenzy,
Their disregard for law,
Their vile and hellish treatment
Of prisoners of war.

“I shall show the savage methods
In which the vandals trust;
I shall fill men’s hearts with loathing,
With infinite disgust.

“For we shall surely crush them
And pull their talons,—yet
It is not safe or fitting
The world should e’er forget.

“This is the sacred duty
I owe to God and men;
And what shall you be doing
When justice reigns again?”

The other puffed a moment
And gazed into his cob;
“I’m going home,” he answered,
“And find a decent job”.

Pro Patria

Not in the passion of anger,
Not in the blindness of hate,
Not in a thirst for adventure
With spirits and hearts elate,
To the grimdest task of the ages
Our lives we dedicate.

But the way of the war is desperate,
And the work of the warriors must be
To sack and destroy and slaughter
With a stern ferocity;
Their art is the art of destruction,
And its background is misery.

And so as they throng to the colors,
These boys with the stride of men,
I honor their hearts of courage,
And I cheer them on,—and then
I ponder alone in the silence
On those who come back again.

Will they stand the test of battle
And come through scarred but true,
With their old ideals unsullied,
And their skies of faith still blue?
Ah, young recruits in khaki,
God speed,—and it's up to you.

Good-bye

A few dead leaves on the mountain oak,
And a weary wind!

Dear Heart, I understand.
For, though in trivial talk you seek
To hide your love-lit loyalty,
The light hair blown across your cheek,
The wistful beauty of your face,
And every poise of girlish grace,
Reveal your call to me.
Yet, as I watch your hand
Point to yon eagle soaring high,
And long to take it in my own,
There comes from out the sunset sky
The call of wayward, world-worn men,—
Yea, even now Dear Heart, again,—
And I must go, alone.

We loved the west wind well;
And oft have climbed this rock-bare crest
With faces sun-lit from the west,
To greet our faithful, fleet-free friend.
And now he bids me linger still,
To dwell with maiden, wind and hill
Till fevered fancies end.
Dear Heart, how sweet the spell!
My trembling lips would seal the dream
And pledge our lives to wood and stream,
Did not that clear call haunt me yet;

But you must stay, and I must go;
And still the western wind will blow,
 Lest ever we forget.

Look, Love—the evening star!
And we might wander on and on
With buoyant step from dusk till dawn
With that bright mystic star above,
Avoid the frantic mid-day strife,
And journey hand in hand through life
 In pilgrimage of love.
Ay, but we look too far;
For see,—a twinkle by the pond,
Another, and still more beyond;
And myriads, Dear, beyond our ken.
Shine on fair star, but my lone way
Leads to the glamor of the day,
 Back to the streets of men.

Dearest of Hearts, good-bye.
How often we have parted, you and I,
As comrades of the morning wave adieu
And think how sweetly welcome will repay!
It was not thus,—to feel your eyes of blue
Stare blankly into mine, and turn away.

No word! No tear! No sigh!
And now, Brave Heart, good-bye.

A few dead leaves on the mountain oak,
 And a weary wind!

The Singing Leaves

I am roving to-day with the singing leaves
And the wind that bids them sing:
They tag my heels in a merry chase,
And seek the brook for a fitful race,
And eddy and soar with an airy grace,
Each borne by a fairy wing.

I am seeking my strength from the singing leaves
And the wind that bids them sing:
For they lull the weary mind to rest,
Until it wakes with a keener zest
To trail the truth to the ultimate test
Of human reckoning.

I am baring my heart to the singing leaves
And the wind that bids them sing:
I dream of the lure of the Hidden Way,
And I hear the call of the active day,—
A love like prayer and a work like play
In the peace and the joy they bring.

I am taking my hope from the singing leaves
And the wind that bids them sing:
They carol of yester years to me,
They tell of the years that are yet to be,
They charge me shape my destiny
And be ready to greet the spring.

Morning and Evening

The breath of spring is in the fields,
The moonlight sheds its dreamy grace;
In modest happiness she yields,
And nestles in his strong embrace.
Their eyes one precious vow repeat,
Too sacred for the mortal tongue;
Their soft lips touch in tribute sweet,
When love is young.

The wild winds sweep the drifted snow,
The leafless branches toss and sigh,
And, sitting in the hearth's warm glow,
The lovers watch the embers die.
Glad memories bring kind release
From trials and worries manifold;
Their silver heads are crowned with peace
When love is old.

Departure

One last, slow walk along the village street,
One last, long night upon a restless bed,
One last, poor struggle with a tousled sheet,
A weary gasp, and lo my friend is dead.

Ah, where is now the warm clasp of his hand?
And where the lustre of his shining eye?
Beside the death-bed I who loved him stand
And blindly wonder what it means to die.

Above the distant hills the evening star
Is like a beacon on a shoreless sea;
The path it faintly lights leads straight and far,
But where within that silent realm is he?

Alone he went upon his mystic way,
Without a comrade sought the vast unknown;
He even cast aside his case of clay;
The spirit stripped for flight and went alone.

But did he venture forth in trembling fear?
Ah, strangely no. It rather seemed to me
He gladly left the life he once held dear
To test the mettle of the Yet-to-be.



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